Amanda Anastasia: Bright Eyes, Bright Future

If you ask people who have witnessed Amanda Anastasia using Camera Mouse to describe the scene, they use words like, “captivating” and “unbelievable.” The technology is perfectly suited to the bright nine-year old with a severe neurological condition that prevents her from walking or speaking. When Campus School staff members Marialice Curran and Phil DiMattia visited her in January, they were thrilled with her progress. She is completely at home with the technology, opening and closing programs, and navigating the computer entirely on her own. She also amazed everyone when she used the system to spell out a message inviting her friend Olivia to her grandmother’s house to bake cookies.

Amanda began using CameraMouse eighteen months ago when her home system was donated by Lou Belli, the father of Tommy Belli, a Camera Mouse user who passed away. Since that time, Amanda’s mom, Samantha Anastasia, has lobbied with the local school district to have the technology integrated into Amanda’s Individual Education Plan. This year, Amanda has started the second grade in a regular classroom. Amanda’s mom explains, “Camera Mouse is so important to Amanda’s learning because it allows her to go in and choose an answer (See Amanda Anastasia, page 2).

Camera Mouse Finds Wings in Northern Ireland

Recent months have seen Camera Mouse technology in Northern Ireland grow from a small pilot program at five schools to a full roll-out implementing 64 systems at 26 different schools. A special steering group composed of Department of Education officials, teachers, curriculum support officers, and an occupational therapist will plan and deliver training during the roll-out.

Alan Nixon, a curriculum support officer from Northern Ireland’s South Eastern Education and Library Board writes, “Feedback from teachers has been positive and they all want to continue exploring the possibilities Camera Mouse has to offer.” The launch in Northern Ireland marks a major milestone for the project, whose main goal is to deliver the technology to as many people who can benefit from it as possible. Two years ago, the technology was licensed to CM Solutions, a start-up in Dallas, TX, in order to make it available to a wider public. Since that time, CM Solutions has added features to the product and brought it to market. (See www.cameramouse.com).

The technology, developed originally in a laboratory at Boston College, is helping educate children in Northern Ireland.
As a longtime friend to the EagleEyes Program and the Campus School, Marialice Curran has invested much of her personal and professional life in helping students with severe disabilities achieve their learning goals. Having recently earned a doctorate at BC, Marialice is now leaving the Campus School and moving on to new challenges.

BEAT: You have long been involved with the Campus School. Can you describe how you got here and what made you stay?

Curran: The first time I came to the Campus School, I was in high school. My Dad, Frank Curran, was the school’s curriculum coordinator and he was playing Santa for the students. I remember feeling totally comfortable. My Dad was committed to the Campus School and the EagleEyes Program. I knew I wanted to teach and I knew that the Campus School was a very special place. When I eventually came to work at the Campus School in 1998, I had a unique connection with the staff and students at both the Campus School and EagleEyes program.

BEAT: What will you miss most about working at the Campus School?

Curran: There are so many things I’ll miss. The close relationships I’ve formed with students, parents and undergraduates. One thing about being at the Campus School is that every day you are reminded how good people are — the students, staff, and parents are remarkable. And being around the undergraduate students and seeing the difference they make in the lives of Campus School students is very rewarding.

BEAT: What will you most remember?

Curran: Some of the moments I will most remember are the breakthrough EagleEyes sessions. Just one example is a session when a man in his 40s was able to communicate with his father for the first time through EagleEyes technology. There have been many other such breakthroughs that I have been privileged to have witnessed.

BEAT: Is there anything you hope will be your legacy in the EagleEyes Program?

Curran: For me, I would be proud to be remembered as Frank Curran’s daughter. It has been an incredible experience to be involved in a project that I know my Dad was so passionate about. I can only hope that I have continued to contribute to the quality of my student’s lives in a manner similar to my Dad.

BEAT: Can you tell us a bit about the book you are writing?

Curran: I am writing the life story of EagleEyes student Matt Galligan with Matt. My family and Matt’s family share a long history. Also, while I was in graduate school, I was Matt’s Personal Care Assistant. Matt, with the many obstacles he has faced, is a fascinating young man with an important story to tell.

BEAT: Any advice for future EagleEyes teachers?

Curran: Expect a lot from the students and always remember that the sky’s the limit!

“A thing about being at the Campus School is that every day you are reminded how good people are — the students, staff, and parents are remarkable.”

—Marialice Curran
Camera Mouse Technology Opens Doors for Student in UK

Gillian Moore, parent of a student at the Hollybank School in West Yorkshire, England, writes about her son’s experience with Camera Mouse:

“Being the parent of a child with multiple and complex needs is interesting, frustrating, and at times, exciting...

Exciting is how I would describe our first encounter with Camera Mouse. After several years of being told by ‘experts’ that my son Andrew could not use any switches or other devices to access communication aids or computers, coming across Camera Mouse was an exciting realisation for both of us.

I first saw Camera Mouse at an exhibition held at Hollybank School in November 2001. I immediately arranged for Andrew, then 8, to test the system. This was a great success and we began weekly sessions the following January. These continued until October 2002 when the Local Education Authority (LEA) agreed to fund a full time place for Andrew at Hollybank School.

Using Camera Mouse gave Andrew a whole new perspective. He was able to play games and really prove his early reading skills by using sentence-building programmes. The confidence that he has gained from these sessions is immeasurable; he has now been able to try and use switches with increasing success.

Christopher, Andrew’s brother, joined him during one Camera Mouse session. Both boys were surprised that Christopher found it very hard to do. This was a complete role reversal for the brothers – and one that they both enjoyed.

The future for Camera Mouse and Andrew remains exciting. He is blissfully happy at Hollybank School; this move has also continued to increase his confidence. Being at the school has meant increased access to Camera Mouse, plus a wide range of switches and adapted toys. In time, we will probably look at buying him his own system to be used with a laptop. For Andrew, the future is bright!”

New EE/CM Web Browser to be Presented at International Conference

What’s in a browser? A lot, if you’re among a population who is accessing the web through assistive technology. Because “mouseclicks” for EagleEyes and Camera Mouse users work on a dwell function where the user “clicks” by dwelling on one spot on the screen, users can easily find themselves off on a tangential link in a direction they never intended. Getting back on track can be a time-consuming and frustrating process.

Boston College alumnus Hunter Larson ’02 spent his senior year looking into the browser problem and the results have been met with excellent reviews at both the Campus School, as well as the Hollybank School. Titled “WebForward,” the browser offers several new features including:

- A new button-oriented visual display that offers easier access to commands like “forward,” “back,” “scroll,” and the “favorites” menu option
- An option to have the page read back to the user
- The ability to shrink or magnify the font
- A dialog box that confirms with the user, “Are you sure you want to go there?”

(The program is available for free as part of the new Applications CD described on Page 2.)

In a recent interview, Hunter described his involvement in WebForward:

“The idea of the project came during a meeting with Professor Gips at the end of my junior year. I did some initial work looking at how the traditional browser could be improved for EE/CM users and was then asked if I wanted to extend the project into a senior thesis. During the summer before my senior year, I worked on creating the first version. Then, once school started, I met with EagleEyes and Camera Mouse users 2-3 times a week. It was through my time with them that I got most of my programming ideas about how to enhance the browser.”

Since graduation, a paper on Hunter’s WebForward project has been accepted for presentation at the 10th International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction in Crete and to be published in a book accompanying the conference. That the WebForward project was chosen is a special honor, as undergraduate research submissions are rarely accepted in the global science arena. Well done, Hunter!
Spotlight on Campus School Volunteers

Who are Campus School Volunteers (CSV)?

Led by advisor Dr. Bill Lambert, the Campus School Volunteers of Boston College is an active group of undergraduate students who donate their time to the Campus School in a variety of ways. Some students serve as “swimming buddies,” some work in the EagleEyes Program and some work with members of the Campus School community to raise funds and promote awareness for the school. With approximately 150 undergraduate students involved, 45 chairpeople and 10 committees, Campus School Volunteers has mushroomed into one of the largest student-run organizations on campus.

“Our goal is to have everyone who graduates from Boston College to have spent some time at the Campus School,” explains Dr. Lambert. The organization believes that the Campus School, located in Campion Hall, is the best-kept secret of BC and that everyone can benefit from exposure to the school and its students.

The EagleEyes Program was established as a committee of its own in the second or third year of the Campus School Volunteer program. Students become involved for a variety of reasons and most that become involved stick with it.

“Once a student becomes a “buddy,” they develop a relationship with the buddy and don’t want to leave. Many students begin volunteering in their freshman or sophomore year and continue volunteering right through to graduation,” says Dr. Lambert.

CSV and Campus School Students Run for the Jimmy Fund

This year, several Campus School volunteers joined with Campus School students to participate in Run for the Cure, a fundraiser for the Jimmy Fund. The 5K race took place on March 23rd beginning at behind Alumni Stadium. Sharif Tai ‘03 ran with EagleEyes student Matt Galligan and Pete Olinits ’04 ran with former Campus School and EagleEyes student Krissy Zitola. Other Campus School Volunteers participating included Gaby Ghafari ’04 and Kristen Nazar ’04.

Pete Olinits described the experience: “We had to be careful because there were bumps on the back roads, but we stayed together and ran the whole time. Matty was really into it!”

The Jimmy Fund supports the fight against cancer in children and adults at Boston’s Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, helping to raise the chances of survival for cancer patients around the world.

CSV in Action

In addition to spending time with Campus School students, CSV sponsors a host of fundraisers throughout the school year. In 2002, Campus School Volunteers raised a whopping $100,000 towards improvements to the Campus School facility and its activities. This semester’s fundraisers included the

Hosting of the
6th Annual Alumni Beanpot Hockey Tournament

On February 1st, 2003, alumni from Harvard, Boston University, Northeastern and Boston College came out and laced up for a competitive match at Conte Forum. Other events included a performance by The Bostonians, a Figure Skating competition and a very animated match of broom hockey played by Campus School Volunteers. The sporting events were followed by a raffle and reception for all participants. Historically, funds raised during these events have been used for projects such as the building and maintenance of the playground outside of Campion Hall.

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Pete Olinits ’04 with Krissy Zitola at a 5K race for the Jimmy Fund.